

# **Women and Fashion in Australia's Nineteenth Century**

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## Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Patricia Burrowes Hanlon, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master of Design (Research), in the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building at the University of Technology Sydney.

The thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in this thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution. This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

Signature: PBH

*Signature on file in Faculty and Graduate Research School Offices*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis casts new light on the clothing culture of the first Europeans who engaged with the land now called Australia in New South Wales, at Botany Bay and the area around Sydney Cove. Many people assume that life for the 'First Fleeters' must have been crude and rough, devoid of any sartorial fashion element. Yet the naval officers would have been well dressed, albeit somewhat dusty, and the First, Second and Third Fleets carried numerous people who had worked in Britain in the appearance industries.

But what of the women? A large number of the convicts transported to New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land has been convicted for felonies connected with clothing theft. Clothing including accessories such as ribbons and handkerchiefs were valuable at the time but also demotic: they were not the preserve of the middling sorts and elites.

Many of the transported convicts were women who had worked in the burgeoning fashion culture of late-eighteenth century Europe. Yet little work has been conducted on their clothing lives.

In this thesis, I speculate as to the appearance of the convict women. I do not disparage them as the discarded, unwanted and unattractive ones as some historians as well as popular images, movies and television series have done in the past. Instead I use traces – in the written record such as diaries, transcripts and transportation lists – mapping this information onto the history of early advertising and the press in the colony, as well as analysing the visual sources that survive from this period.

I work within the frameworks that recognise the value of material culture, object analysis and also the new fashion studies and fashion histories that demand that the poor and everyday be considered as worthy of study as the dress and habits of the elite.

I adopt at times a poetic speaking position, as most of these women were illiterate and they certainly can no longer 'speak'. Yet traces of their material culture, their backgrounds and their narratives suggest that a more robust and vibrant fashion culture probably existed from the very beginning of the European settlement/invasion that most historians have credited. It is my aim that my understanding of the materiality of cloth and clothing will map onto surviving traces, gestures and hints to enable a new story to be told of the first years of western fashion in the Antipodes.



## PREFACE

I was born in Adelaide when there were few fashion design schools in Australia, all in Sydney or Melbourne, thus I had to 'self-educate,' by taking evening courses in Adelaide in anything which might be relevant to "fashion design."

I learnt to draft clothing patterns, and began to design, cut, fit and assemble custom garments for female clients of all ages and sizes. When I began to get orders for making-to-measure for males, mostly theatre and dance ensembles, I had to acquaint myself with classical tailoring techniques and so became aware of significant technical differences between the two practices.

Trained as a teacher, I was approached by the TAFE college to develop a one-year programme on *Fashion Careers* for the unemployed. It prepared versatile students ready for the industry, plus prepared those students of both sexes intending to move on to further study. The course proved successful and popular, and I was asked to take on the Certificate and Diploma subject, *Fashion and Costume History*.

I found there were very few books on Australian fashion, but books on the earliest period were non-existent, so eventually I relocated from Adelaide to Sydney and its convicts, to begin where it all began.